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NATIONAL NEWS

Brill Book: Race to the Top Scores Sparked 'Near Panic' at Ed. Dept.

Education Week

By: Michele McNeil

August 18, 2011

http://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/campaign-k-12/2011/08/brills_new_book.html

Louisiana and Colorado take heart: Senior staff members at the U.S. Department of Education [really wanted you to win](#) the Race to the Top. So much, that when the round-two scores came in, and your states were inexplicably scored out of the winners' circle, the staff was in a "near-panic," while Education Secretary Arne Duncan was "surprised and upset."

"There are problems. ... Big problems," then-Race to the Top Director Joanne Weiss told Duncan when the scores came in, writes journalist Steven Brill (paraphrasing Weiss' comments) in his new book, *Class Warfare: Inside the Fight to Fix America's Schools*.

The Education Department staff chewed over whether Duncan should handpick the winners, choosing out of order and probably skipping Hawaii, whose high score was called "bizarre" by two senior staff members, and maybe New York, whose second-place finish was a "shocker." (That option was quickly nixed.) Staff members debated whether to cut the grants down to just three years, versus four, so they could fund more proposals. They also debated trimming funding drastically for each state, by as much as 40 percent, so the awards could reach as far down as Louisiana and Colorado (which ranked 13th and 17th, respectively).

As we know, Duncan decided to [stick with the top 10 scorers](#) as determined by the outside peer reviewers, leaving ed-reform darlings Louisiana and Colorado behind.

The book by Brill, who is best known in education circles for exposing New York City's "[rubber rooms](#)," is not a Race to the Top exposé, but is part history lesson, part character study, part political gossip column, and part policy analysis. It traces the standards-and-accountability movement back to the 1983 report *A Nation at Risk*, delves into the evolving characters of ed-policy superstars like former Obama and Duncan adviser Jon Schnur, Teach For America founder Wendy Kopp, and ex-New York City Schools Chancellor Joel Klein. It brings the reader into the private discussions of Education Department senior staffers as Race to the Top is conceived, developed, and implemented. It traces the evolution of the group Democrats for Education Reform. And, throughout the book, Brill dives into the issue of improving teacher quality, not just by reviewing the progress of programs like TFA, but by examining the systems, policies (teacher merit pay being a key one!), and political figures that he believes need to be in place to tackle such a vexing subject.

Others have offered their takes on his book, including [Alexander Russo](#) and [Dana Goldstein](#), while [Andy Rotherham](#) has provided details on some controversy already brewing between the irascible Diane Ravitch and Brill over her speaking fees,

which are a minor issue in the book.

And Schnur, who quibbles with some details in the book (as you'll see below), finds that Brill delivers an important message. "[It's] the need in education to really equip and support all teachers systemically to be successful," Schnur said. "From my perspective, the central goal of Race to the Top is to help school systems and states set high expectations for all kids and create the systems and tools to equip teachers and leaders to succeed systemically."

Brill chatted with me for about a half-hour about his book, and I'll have highlights from that Q&A in a subsequent post. So for right now, let's focus on Race to the Top.

Although devoted Politics K-12 readers already know a lot about Race to the Top, from beginning to end, the book does break some new ground and lets us in on how and why certain decisions—very important decisions—were made.

First, on how the competition would be judged. The list of winners—with the notable omissions of Louisiana and Colorado and surprise additions of Hawaii and maybe New York—sparked criticism of the scoring process, and of the judges. Politics K-12 [questioned](#) whether the outliers swayed the scores too much. Brill chronicled in [other pieces](#), including an analysis published online by *Education Week*, how the judges were inconsistent and gullible. The [complicated scoring system](#), in which applications were reviewed independently of each other by different teams of judges, was not how Weiss had originally envisioned it. Now Duncan's chief of staff, Weiss wanted to use a more collaborative scoring process, where teams of judges could work together and examine proposals against each other. But making the process so collaborative would open it up to the public under the 1972 Federal Advisory Committee Act, according to the department's lawyers. And that wasn't going to happen.

And worse, the book says, department staff members—including Weiss—were told they could not read the states' proposals. Lawyers told them that might influence how they advised the peer reviewers.

The book also shines a spotlight on the role of Jon Schnur in Race to the Top—a role that now seems to be in question. Portrayed as a reluctant Godfather of sorts, Schnur—a Democrat who founded [New Leaders for New Schools](#)—is the central player in the competition, from beginning to end. As an education transition adviser to President Obama and Duncan, Schnur was instrumental in drafting the contest, giving it what would become a very catchy name, and shaping its framework, the book says. The book goes on to make Schnur a key decisionmaker, alongside Duncan and Weiss, as the department in the summer of 2009 implemented the contest, developing scoring rubrics, making decisions on who would judge, and even perhaps on how many states would win in the first round.

In an interview, Schnur, who left the department May 1, 2009, told me Brill overstated his role in general—Schnur said that he was one of several key people putting the "best thinking" on the contest together. "My particular role, while significant, was overly dramatic and oversimplified" in the book, Schnur said. And specifically, on whether he was involved in the implementation of the contest, Schnur told me: "While it certainly may be true that the ideas that we developed earlier on may have shaped what came in the post-May 1 detail work, I wasn't involved in the Race to the Top planning details post May 1." The Education Department seems to agree, and a spokesman told me: "Jon left the department in April of 2009 and did not play a role in Race to the Top after that." The rules of the competition, such as the scoring criteria, were developed in June and July, after Schnur had left.

Brill told me he stands by what he wrote in the book. And in general, Brill said: "To me, I think [Schnur's] important. To me, he was a coalescing figure that held the narrative together. He just seemed to be everywhere."

And finally, one other key Race to the Top player emerges in Brill's book whom you don't hear much about: Robert Gordon. A former aide to John Edwards, Gordon came into the Obama administration as the education expert at the Office of Management and Budget. Then he [moved up](#) to be the No. 3 in command. He was a key player as the administration conceived of the contest idea, and as the Education Department developed the rules to implement the program.

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Teacher-Coaching Boosts Secondary Scores, Study Finds

Education Week

By: Stephen Sawchuk

August 18, 2011

http://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/teacherbeat/2011/08/teacher-coaching_boosts_scores.html

Teacher-coaching linked to a well-known teaching framework paid dividends for student achievement in the secondary grades, according to a study published today in *Science* magazine.

In all, the [study](#) found a 0.22 standard deviation increase in the scores of students taught by teachers who received a special form of teacher-coaching—roughly the equivalent of an increase from the 50th to the 59th percentile—relative to the students taught by teachers in a control group.

"This study shows dramatically, clearly, when you implement a [teacher] measure rigorously and couple it closely to a PD system, you get dramatic improvements in student achievement," said Robert C. Pianta, a professor at the Curry School of Education at the University of Virginia.

For the study, Pianta and four colleagues, all psychology researchers, randomly assigned 78 middle or high school teachers to participate in the special coaching intervention, or to their regular in-service training. There were no significant differences in the

characteristics of the treatment or control group or in the population of students they taught. The study covered some 2,200 students in all.

Professional development was keyed to the Classroom Assessment Scoring System-Secondary, or CLASS-S. It is essentially a modified version of Pianta's well-known CLASS framework.

The key aspect of CLASS is that it focuses heavily on specific observable interactions between teachers and students, such as behavior management, productivity, and conceptual development. Originally designed for P-3 teachers, the researchers modified and tested CLASS for teachers of secondary students. In particular, they tailored it to respond better to research on adolescent learning needs, which include opportunities for them to make decisions about what they're learning and chances to work with their peers, according to Joseph P. Allen, a psychology scholar at UVA and one of the study's authors.

The training was delivered via a Web-based approach called My Teaching Partner, again devised by Pianta and team for use with CLASS. Under the system, each teacher taped his or her instruction and then uploaded it to an online portal. The tapes were then viewed by "coaches" trained on the CLASS-S domains. Then, the coaches would discuss particular interactions with teachers in phone conversations, including how they aligned to the CLASS-S framework and ideas about how to improve those interactions.

The study found that, while there was no effect on student scores in the first year of the intervention, students taught by the teachers receiving the CLASS-S support outperformed those who received regular in-service training in the following year. Further, the study found that some of the improvement could be directly linked to changes in teachers' behavior caused by the extra support.

There are a few reasons to pay attention to this study. For one, effective professional development, in general, remains a very tough education nut to crack. A random-assignment study such as this is important because it demonstrates not only that the PD is linked to student achievement, but also that it *caused* some degree of that achievement. It is especially noteworthy at the secondary level where research on effective professional development is quite sparse.

As I reported last year, rigorous studies of [PD approaches are generally few and far between](#). Professional development is challenging to study. There are all kinds of potentially confounding factors, like differences in funding and implementation. And professional development is inherently a complex endeavor. Any teacher training affects students only indirectly, after it is filtered through a teacher's own practices.

It's important to note that the My Teaching Partner approach is a very specific way of analyzing and discussing teaching practices. The lesson here is that educators must devise an effective way to help teachers embody new practices and behaviors; merely selecting a set of teaching standards is not enough on its own.

"It is a model for coaching that is different from a lot of other models in that it's very prescribed, very focused on a way of constructing the coaching session, and what the coach does to identify behaviors they work on, and how the coach gives feedback," Pianta said.

Second, the study also tells us a bit more about teaching frameworks, which are being used as the basis of new teacher-evaluation systems. (CLASS is one of several models now being used.)

Scholars have been exploring whether teachers ought to be coached and/or assessed [using a general teacher-behavior rubric, like CLASS-S, or one that's customized for each teacher's specific discipline](#) or content area. This study found that the improved teacher-student interactions predicted student achievement regardless of the content area in question.

Pianta told me teachers in the study taught in four different content areas and gains were seen in all of them. Again, this is an interesting finding, especially in light of debates about whether secondary professional development should focus on additional content *acquisition* or on ways of *better teaching* content.

A variety of other scholars are also exploring this issue. At the University of Michigan, researchers are looking at math-specific teaching frameworks, while others at Stanford University are reviewing English ones. Much of the study is part of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation's [Measures of Effective Teaching Study](#). (The nonprofit that publishes *Education Week* is a former recipient of Gates Foundation funding.)

Finally, the UVA study also raises some interesting conceptual questions about the very nature of professional development that are worth outlining. The CLASS-S approach here was purely a professional-development tool and not linked to any evaluative purpose.

Some of [the most recent research on teaching frameworks](#), however, have been in districts such as Cincinnati, where the framework doubles as part of a formal teacher-evaluation system.

I bring this up merely to point out that the line between professional development and evaluation is not one that's been well defined or illuminated in current discussions about teaching. But it's poised to emerge as another tension point for the field, especially as more time and energy are spent on teacher evaluation.

Take the case of the District of Columbia, for instance. There, the teachers' union insisted on [a formal separation](#) between "master educators" who do some of the conversations in the teacher-evaluation system, and the district's professional-development coaches.

In general, Pianta said he thinks that much more attention needs to be paid to studying teacher-evaluation frameworks and ensuring a good link between what teachers are evaluated on and what supports they receive.

"We should be treating performance assessment with the same rigor that we treat assessment of student achievement," he said. "The risk here is that there's too much looseness on these assessments of teacher performance."

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FLORIDA NEWS

Charter schools must improve, Florida Governor Scott Says

Orlando Sentinel

By: Dave Weber

August 18, 2011

<http://www.orlandosentinel.com/features/education/os-charter-usa-rally-081911-20110818.0,1297947.story>

Charter schools have to prove themselves worthy of existing, Gov. Rick Scott said Thursday during a back-to-school rally for charter school teachers in Orlando.

Scott urged them to say, "hold me accountable."

He said charters and traditional public schools should compete for excellence. Then students who can choose among them will be the winners, he said.

"We want great charter schools, and we want great public schools," Scott said during the appearance at the Charter Schools USA kickoff at the Rosen Plaza Hotel on International Drive. "I want the best ones to get better."

The governor's comments seemed a move to appease critics who say he has spent too much time championing charter schools since taking office in January. Charter schools have been highlighted in a number of Scott's appearances, including his budget signing in May, while traditional public schools have been ignored.

During a later interview with the Orlando Sentinel editorial board, Scott acknowledged that he had not spent any time visiting traditional public schools, which have been the focus of much of his criticism of education in Florida.

"But I will be," Scott said.

Speaking to the crowd of about 2,000 Charter Schools USA employees, Scott gave a nod to the charters that are independently operated, but financed with tax dollars. Charter USA manages 25 charters in Florida with about 23,500 students, making its operation larger than 40 of 67 public school systems in the state.

He said charter schools must prove their promise as an escape route for students "stuck in poor performing schools."

"You have to make sure that you are great," he said. "If you don't, you are going to get a lot of criticism."

Charters were under fire earlier this summer when school grades came out and charters earned nearly half of the 31 F grades handed out statewide, although they represent only a fraction of the state's more than 3,000 public schools.

Overall, they performed no better than traditional schools, although they originally had been billed as a superior alternative.

Michelle Rhee, the controversial former chancellor of Washington, D.C. public schools, also spoke during the event. She told the charter employees that some charter schools are excellent and some are not, and the bad ones should be closed down.

Scott also commented on criticism of Charter Schools USA for holding the event.

The for-profit management firm, which is paid with tax dollars, bused in employees from across the state for the daylong event, including lunch, at the upscale Rosen Plaza. Orange and Seminole school district officials said the expense was misguided when schools across the state face a budget crisis for daily operations.

"Leave it to the local educators to decide how to best spend their money," Scott said.

Charter schools, including those managed by Charter Schools USA, have complained that they are inadequately funded by the state.

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A challenging school year awaiting Florida Students

Bradenton Herald

By: Staff

August 19, 2011

<http://www.bradenton.com/2011/08/19/3430178/a-challenging-school-year-awaiting.html>

Students, beware. Parents, too. Florida continues to tighten the screws on the public school system with new laws intended to improve student achievement even with deep cuts in education spending.

Students will experience several major changes this coming school year, which opens Monday in Manatee County.

New take on tests

As part of changes in Florida's Next Generation Strategic Plan adopted last year, end-of-course exams will be expanded in middle and high schools from algebra into geometry and biology. In a field test, U.S. history exams will be taken at a sampling of high schools.

Like last year's algebra exam, students will take these new tests on computers.

The state will also continue to shift the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test to computers with students in sixth and 10th grades taking reading exams online.

Other grades and tests will remain on pencil and paper.

Computer proficiency is becoming more and more critical for student success.

Children lacking access to a computer after school are at a distinct disadvantage, especially the growing number of homeless students.

Class sizes grow

While the Legislature failed to persuade voters to ease the 2002 classroom size amendment last November, lawmakers were able to relax the tight restrictions on hundreds of classes. For example, high school foreign language and most Advanced Placement classes can surpass enrollment caps.

The amendment limited classes to no more than 18 students in Pre-K to third grade, 22 in middle school and 25 in high school. But the caps remain in effect for core classes, although the new rules allow districts to exceed enrollment in those by three to five students after October should the creation of a new class be too difficult.

With the amendment's exorbitant costs and the state's harsh spending cuts on education, the Legislature found a way to work around voters in order to save money. But this is a national phenomena. At least a half dozen other states have eased class-size laws over the past two years over tight budgets.

Larger classes could be difficult on students, but whether that detracts from their education remains to be seen.

School choice

Gov. Rick Scott and the Legislature expanded the options that parents can consider for their children with five pieces of legislation. One eases the rules on the creation of charter schools, state-supported but privately operated. Another expands eligibility in the state's private school voucher program for students with disabilities.

The most significant change increases eligibility in the Opportunity Scholarship program so more students at chronically poor performing schools can transfer to a higher scoring school. The new law redefines a failing school from one that scores an F two years in a row to those that earn either D's or F's.

Another law expands the state-funded Florida Virtual School into elementary grades, having only served middle and high schools until now. School districts and charter schools can now increase online class offerings.

Also in the virtual world, beginning this year, ninth-graders must take at least one online class in order to earn their high school diplomas. Here again, Florida is emphasizing Internet learning skills -- a trend that is certain to grow and one that parents should take note. Children must master technology to succeed.

Fashion statement

Certain types of clothing have long been banned from schools as inappropriate or offensive. Manatee County's dress code bans "bizarre clothing or styles" and "clothing which displays messages contrary to a positive school environment."

The Legislature enacted a ban on "saggy pants," six years after the initial proposal. This school year, students cannot wear pants so low that underwear or body parts are exposed. This abhorrent practice will no longer be tolerated on school grounds,

finally.

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Students will learn from iPad 2s instead of textbooks at Pasco school

St. Petersburg Times

By: Jeffrey Solochek

August 19, 2011

<http://www.tampabay.com/news/education/k12/students-will-learn-from-ipad-2s-instead-of-textbooks-at-pasco-school/1186746>

WESLEY CHAPEL — From a tiny classroom off the media center at Wiregrass Ranch High School came laughter, buzzy whispering and shouts of, "This is so cool!"

These 25 freshmen were the lucky ones chosen for a pilot program providing students with iPads instead of textbooks. The students picked up the devices Thursday and spent time taking pictures, exploring maps and playing with the many functions.

"It's a very big deal," 14-year-old Tom Downing said of the school's measured move into a paperless learning environment. "These are brand new technologies, and there are actually students handling them for free. I feel very gifted to be able to use this program."

Since opening in 2006, Wiregrass Ranch has been quick to adopt the latest technology for instruction. It became one of the first Pasco schools to allow students to bring laptop computers to school for note-taking and studying, and it won widespread notice when teachers encouraged students use their smartphones for classroom research.

Now it's exploring the world of electronic textbooks and tablet computing on Pasco's tab and behalf. It tapped into the district's technology funds to purchase 30 iPads and 60 applications, which chosen students will use in place of textbooks, notepads, calculators and most of their other school supplies.

"Technology is the future. It's what the kids use every day," said assistant principal Robyn White, who is overseeing the project. "We wanted to see ... will it work?"

A team of teachers and administrators picked the recipients from a pool of ninth-graders who are taking at least four core courses plus the online Health Opportunities through Physical Education. Of 100 eligible students, 79 applied.

The students and their parents must report regularly on how they use the iPad outside of school and make recommendations on how the technology might better fit student needs.

"I've never felt more cutting edge than right now," said Paul Vassak, who teaches AP human geography. "We're putting away the paper and pencil and going digital."

He said students can use programs to make notes on electronic files, to write and submit homework assignments and to get instant updates to the information in their textbooks. They'll have the chance to make multimedia reports, too.

The challenge, geometry teacher Amanda Yingling said, will be to ensure that the teachers effectively use the iPads as an instruction tool. English teacher Kim Krook agreed.

"It's a means to an end. Whether it's hieroglyphics in the old days, or an iPad 2 today, we're here to get learning gains for the kids," Krook said. "Although this obviously is fun."

And cool.

Nick McMillen, 14, said some of his friends who didn't get into the pilot project are jealous. He guessed the coolness factor will not wear off anytime soon.

"I think it's really good," he said of the initiative. "A lot of people can benefit from this, because it's going to make peoples' lives easier. ... And I think it's fun."

Wiregrass Ranch leaders plan to share their findings with other schools, as the district looks toward achieving the state goal of a more tech-savvy academic environment by 2015. If successful this year, Wiregrass Ranch would expand the iPad program.

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Tech-based 'iPrep' program expands into two more Miami-Dade high schools

Miami Herald

By: Brian Goins and Thomas Johnson

August 18, 2011

Alberto Carvalho knows how plugged-in today's young people are.

Having watched his teenage daughter grow-up, with iPhone in hand, the Miami-Dade schools superintendent realized he wanted to change the way schools interact with students.

"I want schools to be loud, vibrant and exciting, complete with digital content," Carvalho said.

So he created iPrep, a program for high-school students that equips each student with a laptop at the beginning of the school year and uses a web-enhanced curriculum to teach the same core subjects with today's technology.

"It is based on very high-end curriculum that is delivered through a combination of online as well as face-to-face honors and Advanced Placement courses," Carvalho said.

iPrep also includes opportunities for students to take part in a local business internship and participate in community service projects.

The first iPrep school opened last year in downtown, and this month, Felix Varela and Killian, two senior high schools in Kendall, will introduce the program.

Students at the newly opened iPrep Academies will have the benefit of the traditional high school structure, meaning they will be able to take electives like band or orchestra, join clubs and play on sports teams.

Carvalho's fingerprints are all over the program, right down to the color of the walls.

"It's like McDonalds," said John Galardi, Felix Varela assistant principal, who will be overseeing the iPrep at Varela. "McDonalds are owned by several different people, but you have to use their same arch, the same logo. The wall colors you see — the magenta, yellow and green — these are the colors of iPrep."

Carvalho looks forward to seeing the program grow and hopes more public schools will implement their own iPrep Academies.

"The plan is for expansion based on popularity, success and demand," Carvalho said. "I am fairly confident that it will expand in other areas throughout the community — and I know why. It mirrors a lifestyle for young people. It's very inviting and replicates a lifestyle around digital content."

Here's a look at the two schools that are implementing the iPrep program this school year.

Varela

Tearing down walls. Scraping off tile. Repainting rooms. Creating a mural. The latecomer into the iPrep Academy race, Felix Varela Senior High in West Kendall, began remodeling its Building 12 beginning on the first day of summer vacation.

Varela's late arrival to the iPrep program forced the school to transform a building into the iPrep look with only a three-month window before school resumes session again.

"We're right on schedule — Not ahead or behind," said Galardi. "We're keeping our fingers crossed that it stays that way."

The project is now on the cusp of closure.

Students were eligible to apply if they have at least a 3.0 GPA, no more than 10 absences or tardies and had passed both the 10th grade Math and Reading FCATs. One hundred fifty students were selected.

Meanwhile, contractors and architects planned how they were going to remodel Building 12.

Walls between classrooms were brought down to form a much larger open classroom, as first seen in the iPrep Academy in Downtown Miami and now in iPrep at Killian.

Tiles on the floor were scraped off in many rooms to be later replaced with carpet tiles and rugs, and all walls from the hallways to the inside of the classrooms have been repainted to the franchised magenta, yellow and green.

The last step has been laying out all the furniture and desks and then hooking up all the technological equipment into the converted classrooms.

One of the several classrooms converted is now what's called an iCafe.

"We're trying to create a Starbucks-styled hang out area, where students who have an off-period, or during their lunch, they can come in here and eat," said Galardi.

A teleconferencing room equipped with microphones across the ceiling and surround-sound speakers allows students and teachers to interact and communicate — almost like Skype — with college professors and other iPrep Academies to guest

lecture on interconnected lessons.

And the open-classroom will feature cross-curricular instruction, where one side of the class room may be teaching American history and on the opposite side may be a language arts class reading a book that is American literature.

“It’s a new model of instruction instead of just the traditional square classroom,” said Galardi.

Most iPrep students are not expected to be in their iPrep building for the entire school day.

“Half the day students will be in class, and the other half of the day they’re involved in internships and community-based projects,” said Carvalho.

Though the iPrep at Killian isn’t as strong on offering internships as iPrep Academy in downtown, Varela has made arrangements with local businesses: Baptist and Jackson South Hospitals, Metro Zoo, the Department of Homeland Security, and even the office of U.S. Rep. David Rivera, R-Miami.

After the first year, all iPrep students will create a capstone community service project over the course of their four years in high school.

Freshmen will be entering a four-year cycle where they are expected to plan and then implement their own project with a charitable or non-profit organization and then present their four-year project at the end of their senior year to a board of teachers.

“We’re not just trying to build in academic, but also community leaders,” said Galardi.

Heading to the future, iPrep at Varela will be growing from 150 students to 350 students for the following year by opening iPrep for all four grades.

Killian

The projectors are wired, “The Pit” is lined with leather computer chairs and the ceilings are filled with student-painted panels — Killian’s iPrep program is ready to go.

This month, Killian Senior High School in Kendall will begin year one of its iPrep program.

Right away, the school is opening the program to all grade levels.

“At first we were just going to have it for ninth- to eleventh-graders, but our students were so enthusiastic, that we opened it up to seniors as well,” said Madeleine Luis, an assistant principal.

There will be 150 students in the program for now, but the school plans to increase that number to 250 in the next few years.

“We had more than 300 applicants for this year,” said Niki Ruiz, an assistant principal. “I’ve got kids coming from Gulliver, Palmer Trinity and Ransom.”

Killian redesigned a section of the school that once housed computer labs and turned the area into an iPrep wing. There are three classrooms, each equipped with a computer-controlled blackboard, a number of smaller multi-use study rooms and a large open room filled with projectors, chairs and computers known as “The Pit.”

The students will still follow the same bell schedule and are able to take any elective within the school, join clubs and play for school teams.

“It’s the best of both worlds,” said Ruiz.

Killian and Varela will offer dual-enrolment college-credit classes.

“The kids can have up to 60 FIU credits by the time they graduate,” said Ruiz.

Junior and Senior students will also be able to have internships or take classes at Miami-Dade College or Florida International University in the afternoon.

“Those students will have flexibility with their schedules,” said Ruiz.

As the principals describe the benefits of the program, they also can’t help but look on in envy.

“Why didn’t they have this when I was a kid?” Luis asked, half-jokingly.

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Ohio: School districts' work paying off with better grades on state report card

Columbus Dispatch

By: Chris Boss

August 19, 2011

<http://www.dispatch.com/content/stories/local/2011/08/18/school-districts-work-paying-off.html>

More central Ohio school districts are making honor-roll status on this year's state report card.

Of the 49 local districts, 36 earned at least an A — including 10 that received a top rating for the first time, according to [report-card information](#) that *The Dispatch* obtained through a public-records request.

"It's been a slow trajectory for us," said Groveport Madison Superintendent H. Scott McKenzie, whose district was deemed "excellent" — the state equivalent of an A. The district has made steady improvements since getting a D in 2004-05.

"It just shows what we can do out here in Groveport Madison," said McKenzie, who shared the district's rating with teachers at a convocation yesterday.

The Ohio Department of Education plans to release [state report card data](#) on Wednesday.

Of central Ohio's 49 districts:

- Twenty-one improved their ratings. Canal Winchester, Delaware, Lancaster, Logan Elm and Marysville jumped up two spots.
- Four districts saw their ratings slip one level, including Hamilton and Lakewood. Both earned B's this year.
- The rest maintained their scores, including Columbus and Whitehall with a C.

The state grades districts on a scale that equates to A-plus through F. Grades are assigned based on test scores, attendance and graduation rates, and how much students have improved year to year.

Statewide, the data released yesterday show that 58 percent of districts are in line for A's or better, up from 48 percent last year. And no district will be declared in "academic emergency." Youngstown schools had scored the only F the previous two years.

Several central Ohio school officials credited better grades to aligning instruction to state standards, improving efforts to intervene with students at risk of falling behind and using test data to measure students' academic needs.

Logan Elm, which earned an A+ for the first time, was among the districts citing those reasons. The 2,200-student district had a B last year.

"We've been concentrating on it," Superintendent John Edgar said. "It takes awhile for the district to get aligned."

He said continuing the course will be a challenge with fewer staff members. As part of \$1 million in cuts for this school year, the district eliminated intervention specialists who tutored students with special needs.

"The impact of the state budget will impact how we respond this year," he said.

Canal Winchester gained two notches on the state rating scale, from a B to an A-plus.

Educators there have added another element in their efforts to help students improve: boosting family involvement in student learning.

"There are all kinds of research to show that this makes a difference," Superintendent Kim Miller-Smith said. "It's such an important piece."

Last year, one of the district's schools held family nights once a month that brought students, parents and teachers together. Students received tutoring while parents met with teachers.

The events attracted 350 to 500 parents. The district is planning programs at all schools this year.

"We're working with and encouraging families to partner with us," Miller-Smith said.

In Licking County, Newark teachers, administrators and staff members celebrated the district's first-ever A rating in an emotional pep rally on Tuesday.

"It gave you goose bumps," said Mark Severance, the district's director of special education. "If you've been here a long time — I've been here 25 years, and I've seen it all — it was wonderful joyous celebration of what we've done for kids."

The district has gradually improved since earning a D in 1997-98.

Last year, the district made less than a year's worth of progress with its students. It did not meet adequate yearly progress goals, the federal measure that requires all types of students to make progress in reading and math. Students met 18 out of 26 state indicators.

This year, students made more than a year's worth of progress and met the federal goals. The district met 20 of the 26 standards.

"It's been so exciting," said Fran Russ, the district's spokeswoman. "The district has made huge strides over the years."

Hamilton schools slid from an A to a B, but officials say the rating shouldn't overshadow the progress the district has made.

Comparing its performance on all state tests, the district made a 78 percentage-point improvement from the previous report card, said Susan Witten, director of teaching and learning.

"We're not focusing on 'excellent' or 'effective' ratings," she said, using the state's names for an A and B, respectively. "What we're focusing on is we are continuing to improve."

Last year, the district was in line for a B based on the number of indicators it met and its performance-index score, a calculation of results on all tests. The rating was upgraded to an A because the district delivered more than a year's worth of material to students.

This year, the district met the same number of indicators but was kept to a B because it made a year's worth of progress with students instead of exceeding that standard.

"We're focusing on our goals and are really pleased," Witten said. "We think we have a lot to celebrate."

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Oklahoma: Urban teacher academy produces teachers with real-world experience

Oklahoman

By: Megan Rolland

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<http://newsok.com/urban-teacher-academy-produces-teachers-with-real-world-experience/article/3595890>

Some things, teachers don't learn in college.

[Stacey Garcia](#), 38, didn't learn how to console a student whose mother was diagnosed with cancer.

[Jessica R. Martinez](#), 25, didn't learn how to teach in a makeshift classroom set up in an auxiliary gym.

Yet both first-year teachers have tackled the challenges they've faced during the first three weeks of school using training they received through the [University of Central Oklahoma's](#) Urban Teacher Preparation Academy.

The program gives college students real-world teaching experience in urban settings for a full academic year.

Garcia and Martinez spent the 2010-11 school year as student teachers at [Capitol Hill High School](#), working closely with mentors and often running the classroom on their own.

After graduating in May, both were offered full-time teaching positions at [Capitol Hill](#), which they gladly accepted.

"This is where my heart is. This is where I need to be," Martinez said. She is fluent in Spanish and passionate about helping her students.

Seven of the nine students in UCO's first class of urban teachers were hired by the [Oklahoma City School District](#), and one accepted a job in the [Midwest City-Del City School District](#).

The seven teachers are among more than 60 first-year teachers in the Oklahoma City School District, which also hired 50 teachers fresh out of college through the national [Teach for America](#) organization.

Bill Pink, associate dean of the [UCO College of Education](#), said the beauty of the urban teachers program is that it produces teachers with "staying power."

"Over the course of the semester, they get a reality dose," Pink said. "They get to see the first day of school, and they will also see the last day of school. They were able to spend a year in an urban school, and after a year, still think this is what I want to

do.”

Many of the teachers are from [Oklahoma](#).

Academy student [Kristen Richardson](#) graduated from [Northeast Academy for Health Sciences and Engineering](#).

“I’m an urban kid,” Richardson said, adding she and her classmates were sometimes stereotyped. Now she hopes to help other urban students overcome such perceptions.

Pink said UCO continues to support the academy teachers even after they graduate from the program. Graduates are taking early steps this year toward earning National Board Certification, a rigorous process that they will be eligible for in two years.

The program and the continued professional development aren’t cheap.

A combination of donations from private foundations, and a partnership between UCO and the Oklahoma City School District funds the program.

Quality mentors

At Capitol Hill, Garcia taught under [Meredith Wronowski](#), district teacher of the year and state teacher of the year finalist.

At [Taft Middle School](#), [Heather Sparks](#), 2009 Oklahoma Teacher of the year, mentored an academy student.

“We’re able to snatch those kinds of teachers for mentors,” Pink said.

[Jennifer Karber](#), a Capitol Hill English teacher and academy mentor, said she’s been impressed with the quality of students.

“I don’t know what they’re doing,” Karber said. “But their screening process is working.”

Students at UCO must apply for the program before their senior year and be able to spend the entire year working in a school.

“It’s a good investment for our district,” Karber said. “It’s a program that has been needed for a long time, and it probably should be bigger.”

This year, 12 students are in the academy. They are working at Bodine, Linwood and Shidler elementary schools; Jefferson, [Taft](#) and Belle Isle middle schools; and Capitol Hill and U.S. Grant high schools.

On Wednesday, three weeks into the school year, Martinez started her freshman English class by asking students to write down negative perceptions they hear about being a student at Capitol Hill High School.

“Now you’re going to tell me how you’re going to change those,” Martinez said.

Students wrote their ideas on [Post-it notes](#) and put them on wall. The auxiliary gym echoed with voices from other classrooms, separated only by temporary walls.

But students in Martinez’s class were focused and attentive.

Martinez said the biggest gift from the teacher preparation academy was learning classroom management skills.

“It went from ‘What am I going to do to kids if they misbehave?’ Now, it’s ‘What can I do in the interim to prevent bad behavior, to do away with the opportunity for these issues?’” Martinez said.

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New Delaware law toughens scrutiny of charter schools

Associated Press

By: Staff

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<http://www.timesunion.com/news/article/New-Del-law-toughens-scrutiny-of-charter-schools-2122719.php>

DOVER, Del. (AP) — Board members at Delaware’s charter schools will have to undergo criminal background and child abuse registry checks under a bill being signed into law by Gov. [Jack Markell](#).

The bill Markell is signing Friday also prohibits individuals who have felony convictions or convictions for a crime against a child from serving on a charter school board.

Charter school board members also will be required to disclose any financial interest they may have in the charter school.

Lawmakers passed the bill after The [News Journal of Wilmington](#) reported that the founder of [Reach Academy](#), the first all-girls charter school in Delaware, had a criminal record, several aliases and had declared bankruptcy several times.

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